



SUNSETTER'S GAZETTE

*Newsletter of the
Seventh Fighter Command Association
USAAF-World War II*



NEWSLETTER

Spring 2014

VOLUME XXVIII NUMBER 1

7th Fighter Command History in the Words of the Men Who Lived It.

It has been some time since I published a newsletter, and due to the popular request to do so, I am following through on those requests. It also has been awhile since I have gotten any submissions for the newsletter, so I have struggled as to what to write about. This week I happened upon four boxes of letters that Jack Lambert generously sent me several years ago. Jack had used this material as the basis for his excellent book "[The Pineapple Air Force](#)". He had taken excerpts from these letters as well as unit histories and his own personal research to build a comprehensive history of the 7th Fighter Command. If you don't own it, I suggest you borrow a copy from your local library, or better yet, you can still order it directly from the publisher at www.schifferbooks.com, or on www.amazon.com.

As I started to browse through the letters, I realized that here was the source of material I had been looking for. My intent is not to try and reproduce what Jack has done, but give you, the reader, a glimpse of the unedited full length memories of war as they lived it. I am sure these accounts will move you as much as they have moved me. As I read though the letters I am transported back 70 years to when the young men of the 7th Fighter Command were setting the stage that would eventually win the war in the Pacific.

In the next few newsletters, I will present the stories from these letters in no particular order as I read and scan them. At some point in the future if there is sufficient interest, and when I have had the opportunity to review all of them, I may put them in chronological order and publish them on our website.

Here are their stories in their own words:

James C. Van Nada - 72nd FS / 318th FG - December 23, 1943 – Mili



Jim Van Nada on the wing of his P-39 "Sad Sack" – Photo courtesy Ivan Viers

"After some 600 hours in fighter-type aircraft in two different combat zones, this was my first sight of Japanese fighters in flight. Our mission was to escort a squadron of A-24s over Mili Island where they were to dive bomb shipping in the harbour. Navy fighters were flying high cover. At the target the P-39s started a strafing run on a large freighter prior to the A-24s bombing run. We pushed over from about 15,000 ft. and during the descent I saw almost simultaneously a Jap Zero falling in flames, a huge phosphorus AA burst very close at my altitude, and another Zero climbing toward the A-24s. Ignoring all this we continued our strafing run on the freighter. We were about the third flight to hit the freighter and after the pull-out I saw that the ships deck was on fire. The P-39s pulled up, regrouped and waited for the A-24s to complete their dive bombing runs. I witnessed several direct hits on the freighter by the A-24s making their slow, almost vertical runs.

As the A-24s were regrouping, the P-39s climbed above and on either side to escort them off the target. About five minutes after leaving Mili, several Zeros started making passes at the A-24s at about 2000 ft. We couldn't stop the first pass but we followed one Zero as he pulled away from the A-24 and I got in a good burst (my first air-to-air shot fired in anger) in a tight turn. The Zero disappeared in a cloud, fate unknown. We turned back to the A-24s and saw another Zero diving down and

away from a completed pass at an A-24. I turned into him as he was pulling up for another pass. We were closing fast head-on and I was squeezing the four fifty caliber machine guns and the 37mm cannon at him all the way in. He broke off in a diving turn to his left and I observed hits on the Zero. Just before I passed over him at an altitude of about 200 ft. I saw him roll to the left and splash into the water.

I didn't feel too proud of our sloppy protection of the A-24s. They took a lot of fire, but I don't think we lost any of them on this mission. Our debriefing and documentation in the form of mission reports was almost non-existent during this entire Makin campaign."

James E. Hinkle - 457th FS / 506th FG – July 22, 1945 Takamatsu Airfield, Japan



457th FS P-51D #542 S/N 44-72570 - Pilot Jim Hinkle – Photo courtesy Ralph Gardner

"The 22 July 1945 mission was to Takamatsu Airfield located on the northern coast of Shikoku on the Inland Sea between Shikoku and Honshu. Our Intelligence had information that Japan was saving planes and gasoline and storing both in a wooded area leading to the airfield.

We were told that there were heavy gun emplacements on top of hills and mounds near this area, so the plan was to hit the storage area in a direction that would allow the greatest angle from ground fire. We passed over the airfield at approximately 14,000 ft, turned and came back at ground level at about 400 miles per hour. My flight was about the third or fourth wave to hit the target. There were planes and gasoline explosions on almost every machine gun burst. Just as I passed the target area my plane was hit on the right side. It cut my right rudder cable and filled the cockpit with smoke. I immediately pulled up to gain altitude and someone yelled, "Hey, Green 3". I said, "I'm hit and burning and may have to bail out". I opened my canopy a notch and as the smoke cleared out I realized it must have been radio wire burning.

Without right rudder I had to trim and fly with the right wing down and as I climbed to altitude every ground weapon in the area had a shot at me and at my wingman who had come up to check on my plane. He said I had bullet holes from front to back on the right side and the tail section below the elevators was blown away.

I had climbed to about 8,000 ft. and was headed out to the southern coast of Honshu where we had a rescue submarine on patrol. During this 30 minutes my engine kept cutting out because of fuel pressure loss and would only regain pressure when I switched gas tanks.

One of my squadron members contacted the submarine (USS Silversides) and told them I was headed there. Shortly after that my engine quit completely and I called the Silversides and told them I couldn't get any closer and I was bailing out.



USS Silversides (SS-236) – 1944 – photo USN

My plane went down offshore and I drifted back toward the beach. It was common knowledge that this was a target area for Japanese Picket Boats and I was quite relieved that I didn't see any coming after me.

After I opened my raft I trailed a packet of dye marker because I was riding 10 - 12 foot swells and I could see only when I was on a crest. I saw a B-29 drop some flares about 3 miles out to sea and the submarine turned and headed for the flares. I

thought another pilot had gone down but fortunately for me the sub turned back to my direction and came in very fast. A crewman threw a line to me and I wrapped it around my waist. Instead of securing the line to the sub, he threw it overboard. I had a leg wound and a little blood with a lot of water made it look worse than it was so the Captain had ordered the crewman net to pull me out of my raft. The sub then circled and slowed down on the next pass and used a rope ladder over the side. The Captain said no other pilot was down and he was convinced of my correct location by the dye marker I was trailing.

The USS Silversides Captain was Commander J .C. Nichols and they had one more week of patrol duty along the coast of Japan. During the time I was aboard we had three dives, one practice, one for enemy evasion, and one test dive after heading back to a sub- tender at Guam.

My cruise with the Navy ended on or about 31 July 1945 on Guam. I reported to 20th A.F. Hqs. and after a Survival briefing and a physical examination I was flown back to Iwo Jima to rejoin my parent organization (506th Ftr. Grp.) where I was assigned until hostilities ceased.

Anecdotes

All the time I was aboard the Silversides I was given royal treatment. My wedding anniversary was July 29th and a special meal was prepared with all the trimmings, even a souvenir menu. The treatment was almost embarrassing and after a few days I mentioned this to one of the officers. He said, "Relax and enjoy it we were very happy to get you." The Silversides is an old sub with a proud record of enemy tonnage sunk during wartime and it has never had an unsuccessful combat tour. Rescue of a downed flyer constitutes a successful tour. I did relax and enjoy it as it turned out to be their last combat tour. I was more grateful than anyone that this tour had been successful.

I understand that the Silversides is now permanently berthed at the Great Lakes Navel Training Center near Chicago. I am looking forward to a trip there with my grandson. If I can remember, after 38 years, I'll show him how complicated it is to flush the "head" on an old submarine."

USS Silversides War Time Patrol Report – July 22, 1945

1415 – Received word of a badly shot-up fighter being brought to us.

1418 – Sighted pilot bailing out. Plane dove and crashed into sea. Commenced heading for pilot, bearing 088 Degrees T, making emergency speed on four main engines.

1424 – Picked up pilot, 2nd Lieutenant James E. Hinkle, Army service number O-829861, USAAF. In good shape physically, with minor lacerations and bruises. Destroyed life raft, and sank it. Position 33-19, 135-58 E.

Morgan R. Redwine - 46th FS / 21st FG – July 9, 1945 Nagoya, Japan



46th FS P-51D #219 S/N 44-73639 – Photo courtesy Ed Gronenthal

"The most exciting day of my life? It was on July 9, 1945 and I believe that it will be the most exciting day if I live to be a hundred. Where was it? It was in Nagoya, Honshu Island, Japan. Or rather it was two miles from Nagoya, straight up.

Ninety six Americans had left Iwo Jima in their P-51s that morning on a mission to strafe airfields 15 miles north of Nagoya. Everything was routine for the first three hours; following that B-29s that served as navigators, calling out the rescue boats that periodically dotted the vast Pacific, watching the occasional islands of the Japanese Empire slip behind our wings, taking a drink of water from our canteens, sliding into close formation and out again, and listening to the radio chatter about the abortions.

Out on the horizon a gray mist appeared. It was the rocky island of Honshu, sprawled over the Pacific like some slumbering

giant. Unconsciously the formation tightened as the pilots prepared for the business end of the mission. Oxygen masks were put on, safety belts adjusted, machine guns charged, gun sights illuminated, the gas switched to fuselage tank, and a final glance given to the instrument panel.

Quickly the formation swept up to the coast and left of the B-29s. The groups going left from the promontory that served as a checkpoint and went up the narrow inlet that opened up into Nagoya Bay. Black puffs of flak silently began to fill the air around the planes. The Japs could always get the altitude of the fighter planes, but were usually off to one side. The radio was silent now, suddenly it crackled.

"Bogeys at 12 o'clock high", someone yelled. I looked up, unable to see anything at first. Then I caught sight of them, up about 25,000 feet. There were about 40 planes, milling around like so many flies at a piece of watermelon.

Without a signal we dropped our wing tanks in order to gain maneuverability and speed. My squadron swung to the right and started to climb for altitude, with Capt. Bradley Smith, the squadron commander leading the way. I glanced at my element leader, Tom Bodie, and then back to the sky. The Tojos had started to come down on us, string fashion. Closer they came as we turned to the left in a belated attempt to meet them head on. It seemed as if they were floating down for ages, taking their time. Smoke and flames were streaming from around the engine cowl and the leading edges of their wings. I wondered what it meant, and then I realized that they were firing at us.

So far I haven't had a chance to fire, but now one Tojo was bearing down on us. I squinted through the site, waited until he was in range, and squeezed the trigger. My plane shuddered as the six fifty caliber machine guns open up with a drawn out brrrrrrrrppp. The tracers pointed their dotted finger at the Jap as he swept on by. I thought that I had hit him, but didn't look around. For a while we twisted and turned with the battle. Now, another Japanese was off my left wing. I looked at the helmeted pilot, hunched over in his cockpit. The sun reflected off his green lacquered fuselage and I saw the big red meatball on each wing. "Cut left Bodie", I called, and turned into the enemy for a shot. I looked over at Bodie, who is turning, the two thin lines of a vapor trail streaming from the tips of his wings as he sucked into follow me. The Nipponese had seen us and reached back on his stick. Like an elevator, he shot up into the air. I pulled back on the stick to follow, but quickly realized the folly of trying to climb with the lighter Jap plane. I relaxed the pressure.

I glanced down to clear myself and then looked below. Parachutes were calmly floating down towards the bay below us. The three black smudges were burning on the water, marking where planes had crashed. I looked back up to check on my Jap, but he had disappeared.

Strangely the air grew quiet. Only occasionally did the radio chatter. Four of us, all Americans, commanded the sky above the bay. The Japs had gone as quickly as they had come. The fires still burned below, but there was no flak. We four reformed as a flight and headed back towards a rendezvous point. There was no use to go down to the target as we were low on gas, having been forced to drop her tanks ahead of schedule.

My mouth was dry and I felt tired, and yet at the same time keyed up. I looked at my watch. Fifteen minutes had elapsed, and it seemed like two.

After landing at the base, I learned that the Japs had lost twenty ships to our one. Witnesses said that Bodie and I had shot down one Jap. I still felt on edge when they questioned me, so the flight surgeon came over and gave me a drink. Later on I took several more and became quite drunk.

James B. Tapp - 78th FS / 15th FG



Jim Tapp - right - after the April 7, 1945 VLR mission – photo courtesy Jim Tapp

Describe your particular fatigue symptoms after a seven or eight hour VLR mission. Did your height (6'2") make any more "crippled" than a smaller man in the P-51 cockpit?

After the first hour and a half or so the survival gear in the seat back got awfully hard but the closer we came to Japan the more that pain faded away. After coming off the target, making rendezvous and starting home the exhilaration of combat or its possibility quickly faded and I began to feel very tired. We were given pep pills to take at our option to ensure alertness over the target area. I found that the let down on return was worse if you used them, so stop doing so. For me by the time we started home the pain in the butt was just a dull ache and not as bad as when initially came on. The letdown feeling depended on how I had slept the night before and how grueling the mission was. Many times we would go straight in and land at you and get on the ground as quickly as possible.

It was anticipated that we would have considerable night intruder activities so torpedo huts were built in the living areas. The intent was to have the pilots sleep there. These torpedo huts looked like a thick skinned Quonset without windows. They also had dirt piled on top for additional protection. We didn't get the night activity, so the one in our area had large galvanized tubs installed which were partially filled with our naturally hot spring water. Returning pilots could soak in the hot tub and then get a rub down. I was always so busy that I never got to try it out. Those that could get there thought it was great.



... the P 51 was fairly comfortable for me particularly after starting out in P-39s are. Although the P 47D had a bigger hole, the rudder pedals were closer to (the) seat, making (it) a little less desirable for me. With a little more depth (and) more cushioning (it) might have been possible. Our seat was our survival kit. It had the one-man raft with its CO₂ cylinder, a box of birdshot, fishing gear, flares, smoke, water, permutit (de-salting) kit etc.

Ivan Viers – 72nd FS / 318th FG - December 21, 1943



Ivan Veirs "Wild Ivan" in his P-38Q 72nd FS – Photo courtesy Ivan Viers

My 1st mission in combat was the most memorable. As I recall, we landed on Makin Island after being catapulted off the U.S.S. Nassau. The very next day Col. Taylor led the first mission into combat for the 72nd Fighter Squadron, which I didn't get to go on. However, on the following day I got in on the second mission as element leader of "Pink flight".

We flew the entire distance from Makin to Mille on the deck to be able to come in under their radar. Our mission was to strafe the airfield and destroy all planes we found, and anything else we could find. When we got within sight of Mille we dropped our belly tanks, and all 12 planes bore in strafing. We only had fuel enough for 3 to 5 minutes of "all out" flying, so we had to quickly do our thing and then head back.

It seems like I ended up at the far end of Mille Atoll and swung around to head back. To my consternation I could see the whole rest of the squadron was already gaining altitude out at sea and heading home. My wingman had disappeared. I figured I had better get out of there pronto, and headed south too.

By now I was approaching a spit of land that extended east from the main Mille Atoll and was covered with palm trees. I thought I might as well strafe that spit on my way out. So I pulled up to get a little above the trees and then bore down with guns blazing. All of a sudden there was a huge blast: my plane was blown straight up and I was enveloped in black smoke.

Then I was through it and heading out to sea.

Looking back I could now see what must have been a fuel dump really pouring out the black smoke, and another plane way back there. I thought, "my gosh, there's my wingman", so I throttled back and began to zig-zag so he could catch up...About then I heard on the radio, "Ivan, there's a Zero on your tail." In a second, I firewalled the throttle and R.P.M. and began wondering what to do next, for I was already only 20 feet off the water.

Fortunately, Snyder and Manning saw what was happening and came to my rescue. I don't know how it all happened in the next few seconds, but I do know that soon the three of us had reversed things and Snyder and Manning were bearing down on the Zero from his right and I was pulling in from his left, all of us right on the deck. I must have been within forty yards and looking right into the cockpit, when Snyder cut loose with his 37 MM cannon.

A high explosive shell hit the canopy, it blew up, and immediately the left wing dropped a little, hit the water, and the plane did a cartwheel into the sea as I whizzed over it at 300MPH.

We rejoined the squadron and headed back to Makin. I was flying on the wing of another plane at about 8000 feet, when all of a sudden his engine caught fire and he started down. We were about midway between Makin and Mille and low on fuel. I called on the radio that I would stay with him and so the rest of the squadron continued on to Makin. The pilot parachuted and I followed him down to the water and saw him get into his life raft. He appeared in good shape and waved to me. By now I was calculating how long I could stay there and still make it back to Makin with luck.

Hoping that our radar would spot me, I flew back up to 12,000 feet and circled directly over him for a few minutes. By now I knew I must leave, for I had less than 25 minutes of fuel in my tanks. I did make it back to Makin quite a bit after the others had landed. My crew chief thought I had gone down on my first mission after the other planes had all come in together.

A number of flights were made out to where I had last seen the pilot, (2nd Lt. Charles Mertz) but he was never seen again. We conjectured that maybe a Jap submarine had picked him up.

Later that day a flight of B-24s, returning from a raid on Eniwetok, radioed that the whole east end of Mille was on fire. My thoughts were, "At last, I have partially repaid the big investment Uncle Sam has put in me these past two years."

UPCOMING REUNIONS

73rd Bomb Wing Reunion

The final 73rd Bomb Wing B-29 reunion is scheduled for 28 May in Wichita, Kansas. They have an open invitation to anyone interested in the 58th, 73rd, 313th, 314th and 315th Bomb Wings. Thursday they have a bus trip (80 miles) to Pratt to visit our Pratt Army Air Field B-29 All Veteran Memorial and Museum. Saturday they have a tour of Wichita including the restored B-29 DOC, located in a former Boeing hanger. It will be one of the last opportunities for a visit with some of the members of the most successful air offensive in military history. It is being held in the Double Tree Hotel at 2098 S Airport Rd, Wichita, KS.

They provide a complimentary 24 hour airport shuttle service. Call 316-945-5272 for reservations or shuttle. Those with the reunion get a \$95 a night rate. The Saipan Superfort has the registration form and Hotel information. Page 6 of the Saipan Superfort has interesting history of our Pratt Army Air Field. If you haven't received the Saipan Superfort, e-mail prattb29armyairfield@gmail.com and we will send an attachment with all the information.

505th Bomb Group (Tinian) Reunion

June 8-16, 2014

Dynasty Casino Resort
Tinian & the PIC, Saipan

Travel back to Tinian where you will awaken to the lush, tropical setting of the Dynasty Resort. The 505th was deployed to Pacific Theater of Operations (PTO) in late 1944, being assigned to the XXI Bomber Command, 313th Bombardment Wing in the Northern Mariana Islands; being stationed at North Field, Tinian. It entered combat in February 1945 with strikes on Iwo Jima and the Truk Islands. It then began flying very long range strategic bombardment missions over the Japanese Home Islands, attacking military, industrial and transportation targets. Switched to night incendiary raids attacking major Japanese cities in the spring of 1945, causing massive destruction of urbanized areas and hastened the eventual Japanese surrender.

Please click the following [link](http://b-29.org/reunions/70th-celebration-Saipan.pdf) (<http://b-29.org/reunions/70th-celebration-Saipan.pdf>) to read the entire brochure about the trip.

For more information contact [Kathy Dahood](mailto:kdahood@alpsnet.com), kdahood@alpsnet.com

**70th Anniversary Iwo Jima Reunion of Honor
Guam / Iwo Jima
(16-23 Mar 2015)**

The 70th Anniversary Commemoration will be Saturday 21 March, 2015 on Iwo Jima as the Joint Ceremony with the Japanese will be conducted at the Memorial above Red Beach. Visits to Mt. Suribachi and the Landing Beaches to walk the "Black Sands" are scheduled. The Iwo Jima Association of America (IJAA) in cooperation with United Airlines will charter jets for the day long visit to walk the battlefields of this epic clash during the Pacific War. Guam will again be the base of operations for the IJAA Battle Symposium and 70th Anniversary Banquet.

For more information please visit <https://www.miltours.com/>

**506th Fighter Group Reunion
Aug 7-10, 2014**

The 506th Fighter Group will be holding their next reunion in Michigan at the Thunder Over Michigan Airshow at the Yankee Air Museum, 801 Willow Run Airport, Ypsilanti, MI

For more information, contact Richard Smith, 4010 Austin Woods Drive, Austin, TX 78759 pt19flyer@aol.com

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Please contact the editor if you have any reunions you would like posted here.

NEWS

7th Web Page

For those of you who have access to the Internet, our webpage is still at www.7thfighter.com. The current roster is also online and is password protected. Please contact me at mark@7thfighter.com if you would like access.

COMMUNICATION

Be sure to let us know if you move or your loved one has passed away. We get many newsletters returned due to bad addresses.

TAPS



If you know of any members who have passed on recently, please be so kind as to inform the Gazette. Deaths are updated quarterly on www.7thfighter.com and can be viewed by clicking the "TAPS" <http://www.7thfighter.com/taps/taps.htm> link on the left column.

REQUESTS FROM YOUR HISTORIAN

Call for Brief Magazines – I am still missing the following Brief Magazines and would be grateful if anyone out there has a copy I could get to complete the collection. Once complete I may try and publish a book with all 95 of the magazines and make it available to the membership in either digital (free) or a physical book (at my cost). The issues needed are:

March 7 1944, April 4 1944, April 18 1944, August 8 1944, November 14 1944, June 26 1945 and July 10 1945

I have the following issues, but they are in poor condition and could use better copies:

October 17 1944, January 9 1945, February 20 1945, March 20 1945, March 27 1945 and May 8 1945

Photos – If you have any photos that you would like to donate, or I could borrow and copy from your time in the military during WWII I would greatly appreciate it. **COLOR** photos are especially appreciated as so few were taken during the war.

Please send to Mark Stevens at the address at the end of this newsletter and if loaned, I will copy them and return them to you in a timely manner.

SUNSETTER'S GAZETTE

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Newsletter of the Seventh Fighter Command - World War II

Please remit your contributions to “**7th Fighter Command Association**” to support this newsletter and website. Contributions are on a voluntary basis and not a requirement to receive this newsletter.

Name _____ Unit _____

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Mail to: Mark Stevens – 14629 SE 198th St, Renton WA, 98058